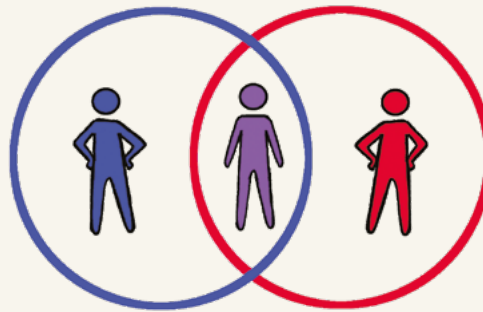


French-Innu Specialized Lexicon of College Studies

Julie Maltais



ACCULTURATION

Nipatakanlu eshi-ilniut

The process by which a person or group of people adopts elements from a foreign, usually majority, culture.

Source: Cégep de Baie-Comeau (2022). *Lexique spécialisé des études collégiales en français-innu*.
Illustration: @Frefon, frefon.com

The existing literature clearly shows that academic perseverance and success depend on a learning environment that is safe for students (Mareschal & Denault, 2020). The project of a specialized lexicon of college studies in French and Innu was therefore motivated by the desire to provide the Indigenous student population with a tool to value the Innu language, the ultimate goal being that this community can identify with the Cégep de Baie-Comeau. When we presented the lexicon to an Indigenous student in the Humanities, she was amazed: a pedagogical tool designed "just for us"!

The program *Le français, au cœur de nos ambitions* [French at the heart of our ambitions, Ed.], established by the Office québécois de la langue française, provides financial support for projects aimed at enhancing the mastery of French. This partnership made it possible to produce a digital tool, the *Lexique spécialisé des études collégiales en français-innu*¹ [French-Innu Specialized Lexicon of College Studies, Ed.], which contains 1,350 words carefully chosen by teachers representing 9 programs of study popular with students from Indigenous communities at the Cégep de Baie-Comeau, namely Special Education Techniques, Childhood Education, Humanities, Nursing, Pre-Hospital Emergency Care, Accounting and Management, Civil Engineering, Police Technology, and Techniques d'aménagement cynégétique et halieutique [Wildlife and Fishing Management Technology, Ed.]. The project was spread over three years, which allowed us to integrate the lexicon of three programs per year.

It was a collaboration not only with the teaching staff, but also with translators from the Innu community of Pessamit and a professional illustrator.

A tangible response to a concrete need

Each year, our CEGEP welcomes approximately 50 Indigenous students from various communities, particularly from the Innu community of Pessamit. Since 1991, staff initiatives have multiplied to improve academic success among the Indigenous student population. The French-Innu lexicon, aimed at facilitating access to the French language and promoting an inclusive approach, is one of these initiatives.

Among all the projects for the improvement of the French language, why choose to create a lexicon? After browsing the web and reading several articles, I consulted the *Guide d'intervention institutionnelle pour favoriser la réussite éducative des étudiantes et des étudiants autochtones* [Institutional Intervention Guide to Support the Educational Success of Indigenous Students, Ed.] published by the Cégep de Baie-Comeau in 2015. Many passages gave me food for thought about the difficulty that French represents for an Innu-speaking person pursuing a college education in a language that has almost no similarity to their own.

The guide emphasizes the importance of teachers ensuring that conceptual

and disciplinary concepts are understood. Several teachers identified the fact that Indigenous students have difficulty understanding certain abstract and specialized concepts, such as words like *compromise* and *empathy*. The following suggestion from the CEGEP guide was the starting point for my project:

Ideally, provide students with a lexicon of disciplinary concepts specific to the course or program in which they are enrolled. Have them develop this lexicon themselves in the classroom, in a team effort. Each team works on a set of definitions, and then the documents are shared and distributed to all students (Santerre, 2014, p. 35).

Once I had decided to develop a lexicon, I wanted it to meet the needs of the Indigenous student community. I then asked myself: what characterizes the learners for whom it is intended? In their recent work, Mareschal and Denault (2020) propose learning strategies based on the holistic approach, which is rooted in listening, observation, experimentation, mutual aid, cooperation and humour. I wanted to consider this approach from the beginning of this project, and from there came the idea of including illustrations to support each of the words in the lexicon.

¹ To consult the lexicon: [français-innu.lexique-cegepbc.ca].

In addition to the observation that affects the learning of Indigenous people, other aspects needed to be considered:

Indigenous students do not always have a good command of the French language. In the first session, many Indigenous students report that they are constantly translating from Innu to French in their heads. This exercise affects, in the long run, their ability to express themselves in class. It must be remembered that this is a second language for them. In addition, they are shy to express themselves in front of people from another culture than their own (Santerre, 2014, p. 38).

To overcome this difficulty, the guide invites the use of various memorization strategies: rereading lecture notes often, making connections between new concepts and known and mastered elements, reciting aloud, writing down what remains to be remembered, using acrostics, plays on words (Santerre, 2014). The particularities related to Indigenous students in the classroom were to be honoured in this project.

Golden translators

The lexicon is the result of a collaborative effort, in which respect is based on the recognition of the knowledge and expertise of each person. The translators are specialists in the Innu language and are committed to the transmission of their language, which explains their enthusiasm for the project presented, despite the scope of the work expected.

The Innu language, an oral tradition, has always been transmitted from generation to generation. As you can imagine, the work done by the translators of the lexicon, H  l  ne St-Onge, Ad  lina Bacon and Louise Canap  , was colossal. We must not lose sight of the fact that the vocabulary of the Montagnais language was mainly related to the activities of the time: hunting and fishing (Conseil des Innus Pessamit, 2018). Most disciplinary vocabulary words do not exist in Indigenous languages. Whether for the Civil Engineering, Administration and Management or Nursing programs, my fellow translators had to make sure they understood the concepts before creating the neologisms in Innu.

Moreover, these precious collaborators had to invent these definitions while remaining as faithful as possible to the Innu nomenclature. To do so, they carried out rigorous research and consultation with the elders of the community of Pessamit, while pursuing a precise objective: to revitalize the Innu language in order to bequeath it to future generations.

The importance of audio recordings

Pronunciation in French and Innu allows for better integration of vocabulary words and learning more about both languages. Non-Indigenous people marvel at the length of Innu words, discovering that it is rare to find a single word to translate a French word. No one is indifferent when they hear the Innu pronunciation, and everyone agrees that the audio excerpts are essential, since writing alone makes reading and pronunciation impossible. The lexicon allows Indigenous students to discover new words in their language, and non-Indigenous students to explore a language that is very different from their own. Certainly, one of the goals that the tool achieves is cultural safety.

The power of illustration

It goes without saying that there are already several dictionaries and lexicons of Indigenous languages, but what distinguishes the *Lexique sp  cialis   des   tudes coll  giales en fran  ais-innu* from traditional lexicons is both its choice of specialized and disciplinary vocabulary and the addition of illustrations. Indeed, in addition to the translation of the words in Innu,

a drawing accompanies each of them to clarify their meaning. The lexicon's illustrator, Frederic Fontaine,² used his creative genius to design unique, original and humorous illustrations. Since many people learn through visual literacy and spatial intelligence, the drawings help to anchor the concept in the learner's memory (Seven Lab, 2021), suggesting that the lexicon can be of help to a wide range of college students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. This tool not only meets the needs of a learner of French as a second language, but also anyone who wishes to understand the specialized vocabulary of their program or for whom the acquisition of terminology could be facilitated by visual representation, including individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

Frédéric Fontaine thought long and hard before creating each drawing, making sure to put the words in context to form a whole with the definition. His work was a substantial challenge, one can imagine, as he had to master the meaning of each term and then find the best depiction. The inductive approach, consisting of constructing one's own answer, proves to be effective in retaining the words and their definition because the brain analyzes the elements of the image, and the attention is first focused on the visual elements; the beginning of a definition is initiated and confirmed with the other elements under the illustration.

Knowing that the word illustrated below is "compromise," in Innu *Uauitshiuaushun*, can you infer its meaning using the different elements of the drawing? Can you get an idea of the concept? Do you think you will remember this word in the long term? I conducted the test during a presentation by starting my session on this page of the lexicon and by the end of the period, all participants could define *compromise* for me, in a special education context, remembering the image accurately.

COMPROMISE

Uauitshiuaushun

Immediate or imminent danger to a child's safety or development that places the child in need of protection.



² Readers wishing to discover the illustrator's work can consult his portfolio [frefon.com].

Source: Cégep de Baie-Comeau (2022). Lexique spécialisé des études collégiales en français-innu. Illustration: @Frefon, frefon.com

A pedagogical aim

In order to make the definitions more meaningful to their students, the teachers have chosen those that will be taught in the courses. Moreover, teachers who wish to do so are invited, at any time, to improve the definitions by providing me with examples of their own, by adding interesting statistics to remember or any other useful information. The lexicon will evolve and thus become a perfectible pedagogical tool. For example, a literature teacher in the Springboard to a DCS - First Nations program suggested including definitions that would accompany her explanations during the sequence on the representation of the territory in Innu poetry. For example, the term *message stick*, in Innu *Tshissinuatshitakana*, taking into account the Indigenous reality, comes from a novel and is defined according to the following illustration.



Source: Cégep de Baie-Comeau (2022). *Lexique spécialisé des études collégiales en français-innu*.
Illustration: @Frefon, frefon.com

In addition, the list of words included in the lexicon allows teachers to target the concepts covered in their courses and to transform them into hyperlinks in their course outlines and in the assignments proposed to students, immediately redirecting them to the lexicon.

Exciting sequels

Since September 2022, the lexicon associated with the nine programs initially targeted by the project has been available online. With the objective of promoting the tool, I presented it to students and faculty at the Université du Québec à Rimouski (UQAR) and at four CEGEPs that invited me to do so. Hélène, Adéline, Louise and I also spoke about it at the *Colloque sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaires chez les Premiers Peuples* [Symposium on First Nations Student Perseverance and

Success, Ed.] held in November 2022. The positive comments allow us to believe that the people we met see the usefulness of the lexicon and that they will contribute to making it known.

Although it is too early to say whether the lexicon will help increase academic success, as the lexicon has only been complete for a few months, several players in the higher education community are interested in it. In fact, more than 80% of the course outlines at the Cégep de Baie-Comeau already mention the lexicon as a tool to help students succeed.

For the moment, the results indicate that the Innu students are proud of it and see the advantages of consulting it. As Stéphanie Nanipou, an Innu student in Special Education Techniques, said: "The Innu language is a descriptive language that translates into periphrases. My teachers

MESSAGE STICKS

Tshissinuatshitakana

During stays in the Nutshimit, Innuat families communicated with each other by means of sticks carefully anchored on the territory in order to indicate to other groups the periods of abundance and famine.

ask me to write more concisely. The lexicon helps me find the right word instead of having to describe what I want to say." Several students from different Indigenous communities recognize the usefulness of the lexicon: an Atikamekw student from the community of Manawan points out that the lexicon gives her the opportunity to learn words in another Indigenous language, while a Humanities student from the community of Uashat mak Maniutenam plans to use it to acquire the disciplinary vocabulary for their field of study. At the Cégep de Sept-Îles, the nursing

and pre-hospital emergency care sections of the lexicon have delighted the teacher in charge of student success, Ève Goulet, so much so that she wishes to include the tool in her course as of the next session.

As far as I am concerned, my wish is that the work done by the lexicon team contributes to keeping the Innu language alive and to making sure that it is enriched with words from various fields of learning to better describe specific and scientific realities, thus promoting educational success. ■

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Source: Annie Paquin



Julie Maltais is a pedagogical counsellor in charge of the improvement of French at Cégep de Baie-Comeau. She has been placing the promotion and mastery of French at the heart of her work for over 25 years. As soon as she arrived at the CEGEP in 2017, she discovered the Innu culture, and the project of the *Lexique spécialisé des études collégiales en français-innu* allowed her to meet four people who were decisive in her journey: the illustrator and the translators, members of the Innu community of Pessamit, with whom she worked on this project. Through the lexicon, she hopes to make the French language more accessible to the entire student community.

jmaltais@cegepbcca